PITTA

Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 22 Number 1 January 2025

FIELD TRIP-1: Sunday, 19th January 2025, 6.30AM: Edulabad Lake. Meeting Points: NGRI Metro Station, 6.30AM. Trip Coordinator(s): Gurukumar KR (Mobile: 99858-07186)

Located near Ghatkesar, Edulabad Lake houses 171 bird species including many waders by the shore. The newly built pathway gives the near perfect elevation to birders for easy spotting. The gorgeous Red Avadavats and Tri-coloured Munias are the Guests of Honour that are an eye feast here.

This will be a half-day trip, so carry adequate water and breakfast/snacks, and protective gear if required. Covid protocols will be followed; please ensure you wear masks, carry a sanitiser and maintain social distancing. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. New Deccan Birders hats and caps will be available for purchase; please come prepared!

OUTSTATION TRIP: Saturday & Sunday, 25th & 26th January 2025: Turkum Cheruvu, Nirmal. Meeting Point(s): Apollo Pharmacy, Miyapur-Bolaram Road, Near Miyapur Cross Roads, 05:20AM; opposite Dindigul Air Force Station, Hyderabad-Narsapur Road, 06:00AM. Trip Coordinator(s): Sathwik Reddy (Mobile: 99858-07186)

Organised by Deccan Birders in association with the Telangana Forest Department, this exhilarating birding expedition and overnight stay at Turkum Cheruvu offers an exceptional opportunity to engage in the Asian Waterfowl Census (AWC), explore the vibrant birdlife around the lakes, and immerse yourself in the area's rich natural beauty. Turkum Cheruvu is a picturesque lake in the heart of the Nirmal district, surrounded by dense forests and diverse wetlands. The area is rich in avian life, making it a prime location for birdwatching. The lake is a vital freshwater body, attracting a wide variety of waterfowl and migratory birds. The surrounding forests are home to numerous species of flora and fauna, creating a perfect blend of wetland and woodland ecosystems.

Till date, over 150 bird species have been officially recorded in the region, with many more spotted by birding enthusiasts. The area has consistently yielded sightings of species such as the Asian Openbill, Black-necked Stork, and several species of waders, making it an excellent site for both novice and experienced birdwatchers. If time permits, we will also visit Kawal Tiger Reserve on 26th January 2025, providing an exciting opportunity to spot a tiger.

More details will be shared on email.

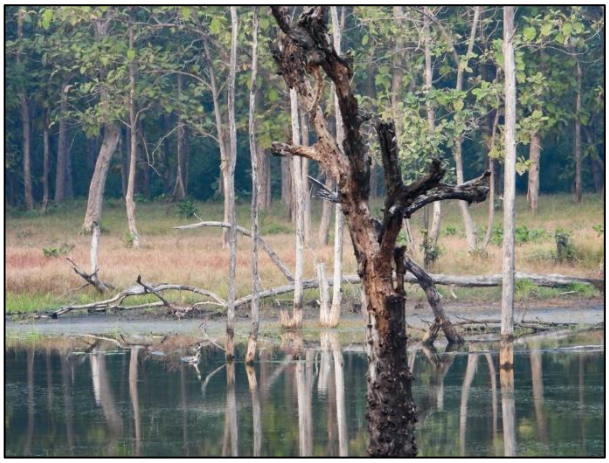
NATURE CAMP & BIRDING AT TURKAM CHERUVU
Report: Camp at Turkam Cheruvu, Nirmal Dist, November 23-24, 2024

Text: Vijaya & Dhiraj Kaveri; Photos: Vijaya Kaveri

Telangana Forest Department (TFD) and Hyderabad Tiger Conservation Society (HyTiCoS) organised a Nature Camp and Birding Event at Turkam Cheruvu and Venganna Cheruvu on November 23 and 24, 2024. These 2 lakes are considered hidden gems of Nirmal District in Telangana. The campsite area is part of Kawal Tiger Reserve (KTR) in Nirmal Division. This event was an experiment to explore the possibilities of developing the area into an eco-tourism spot.

The participants of the event were representatives of the birding community, wildlife photographers, students, nature conservation NGOs and environmentalists from across Telangana. It was nice to meet people from diverse backgrounds.

As birders and nature lovers, our focus was obviously birds and the natural ecosystem. Even before we reached the venue our eyes were constantly looking for birds. One thing which struck us was the numerous nests of the Baya Weavers built on electric wires on the road sides. During the welcome session it was mentioned by the organisers that it is an unusual habit or adaptation by the Baya Weavers, and is not a very good sign.



A view of Nirmal Division Forest (L) and Kawal Tiger Reserve (R)

After the official inauguration of the event by senior forest officials, we headed for a nature safari at Kawal Tiger Reserve nearby. The forest landscape is tropical dry deciduous and is a catchment area of the Godavari River and its tributary Kaddam River.

Yellow-footed Green Pigeon

We did our first bird walk next to a tiny stream, where we spotted Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, White-browed Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Jungle Babbler, Black Drongo, Great Tit etc. After spending some time there, we continued on our safari.

Alexandrine Parakeet

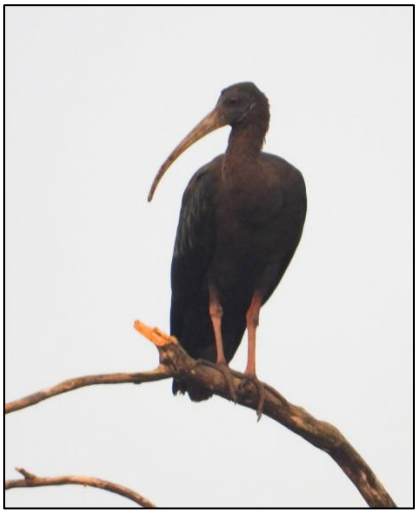
Birders instinctively know where to spot the birds, so we asked the safari driver to stop at a water body. While we were enjoying watching and clicking photos of a pair of Alexandrine Parakeets in their best mood, suddenly we realized there were 2 raptors – Crested Serpent Eagle and Changeable Hawk Eagle – on a single tree!

Crested Serpent Eagle (below) and Changeable Hawk Eagle (above)

This was the highlight of our safari and we literally lost track of time taking their photos.

Crested Serpent Eagle

Changeable Hawk Eagle



Glossy Ibis

Eurasian Collared Dove

Lesser Whistling-duck with chicks

We also saw several other birds – Black-headed Ibis, Glossy Ibis, Little Cormorant, Common Kingfisher, Eurasian Collared Dove – and a family of Lesser Whistling-ducks, including some chicks.

As it was already getting dark we headed back to our campsite for dinner, where we spent the night in our camping tents next to a bonfire.

The bonfire

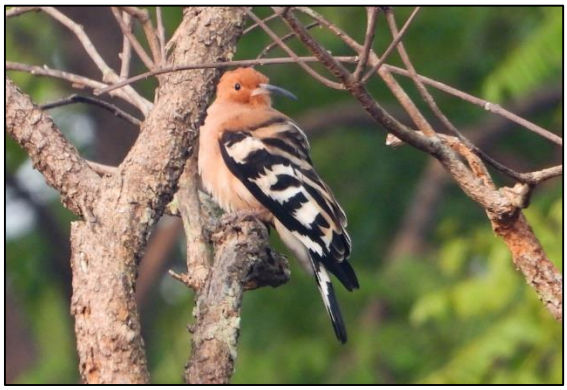
Next morning, in the chilly weather, we started our bird walk around our campsite Turkam Cheruvu, which is surrounded by dense forest. We were split into small groups and headed in different directions. As the weather was cloudy we were initially only hearing bird calls, which we were identifying using Merlin Bird Sound ID, which was very useful.

We also had with us one of our Deccan Birders members, Gokul Krishna, and his 9-year-old son Abhinav, who is an avid young birder – this made the task of bird identification easy. We spotted a lot of birds in this area, like the Common Kingfisher, Chestnut-shouldered Petronia, Rufous Treepie, Eurasian Hoopoe and Common Woodshrike.

Common Kingfisher

Chestnut-shouldered Petronia

Venganna Cheruvu



Eurasian Hoopoe

White-browed Wagtail

But the highlight of this bird walk was the Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker which drew everyone's attention for almost half the time.

Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker

Asian Woolly-necked Stork

We then returned back to the campsite for breakfast and then proceeded for our next birding spot, Venganna Cheruvu, which is another popular birding hotspot and is considered a paradise for bird-watchers.

Indian Pond Heron

All the birders spread across the length of the lake. We spotted a lot of water birds, like Asian Woolly-necked Stork, Asian Openbill, Little Cormorant, Pied Kingfisher, White-browed Wagtail, Citrine Wagtail, Indian Pond Heron and Grey Heron.

Red-wattled Lapwing

Oriental Darter

Medium Egret

Red-wattled Lapwing, Oriental Darter, Medium Egret, Indian Spot-billed Duck, Black-winged Stilt, Ruddy Shelduck, Lesser Whistling-duck, and a few other birds like Indian Roller, Spotted Dove and Greater Coucal, were also seen.

For us the highlight of this spot was the Blue-tailed Bee-eater which took a lot of our attention and time.

Blue-tailed Bee-eater

We then returned to our campsite for a quick lunch, closing event and feedback session.

While we loved the place at the first instant and wish to come here as many times as possible, we are equally concerned about opening these pure and pristine forest areas for tourism. We have already seen littering of plastic and waste in the forest area. If this place is going to be developed as an eco-tourism spot, we just hope and wish that it is maintained as it is now, without disturbing the core nature of the forest and with minimal to zero waste by tourists.

Sunrise at Turkam Cheruvu

"And into the forest I go to lose my mind and find my soul."
- John Muir

The list of birds seen during the camp:

BIRD LIST - KAWAL WLS					
Sl No	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Sl No**	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**
1	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	10	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
2	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	*Treron phoenicopterus*	11	Alexandrine Parakeet	*Psittacula eupatria*
3	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*	12	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*
4	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*	13	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
5	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*	14	Cinereous Tit	*Parus major*
6	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	15	Jungle Babbler	*Argya striata*
7	Crested Serpent Eagle	*Spilornis cheela*	16	Gray Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*
8	Changeable Hawk Eagle	*Nisaetus cirrhatus*	17	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*
9	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*			

BIRD LIST - VENGANNA CHERUVU					
Sl No	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Sl No**	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**
1	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	18	Oriental Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*
2	Ruddy Shelduck	*Tadorna ferruginea*	19	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*
3	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	20	Indian Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*
4	Northern Pintail	*Anas acuta*	21	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*
5	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	22	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*
6	Spotted Dove	*Spilopelia chinensis*	23	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*
7	Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*	24	Great Egret	*Ardea alba*
8	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	*Treron phoenicopterus*	25	Gray Heron	*Ardea cinerea*
9	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	26	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*
10	Little Swift	*Apus affinis*	27	Gray-headed Fish Eagle	*Icthyophaga ichthyaetus*
11	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*	28	Asian Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
12	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	29	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	*Merops philippinus*
13	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	30	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
14	Bronze-winged Jacana	*Metopidius indicus*	31	Pied Kingfisher	*Ceryle rudis*
15	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*	32	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*
16	Asian Openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*	33	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*
17	Asian Woolly-necked Stork	*Ciconia episcopus*	34	Citrine Wagtail	*Motacilla citreola*

BIRD LIST – NIRMAL FOREST					
Sl No	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**	**Sl No**	**Species Name**	**Scientific Name**
1	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	11	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*
2	Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*	12	Cinereous Tit	*Parus cinereus*
3	Eurasian Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*	13	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
4	Asian Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	14	Green Warbler	*Phylloscopus nitidus*
5	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	15	Greenish Warbler	*Phylloscopus trochiloides*
6	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	16	Indian White-eye	*Zosterops palpebrosus*
7	Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	*Yungipicus nanus*	17	Indian Robin	*Copsychus fulicatus*
8	Alexandrine Parakeet	*Psittacula eupatria*	18	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*
9	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*	19	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	*Cyornis tickelliae*
10	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*	20	Chestnut-shouldered Petronia	*Gymnoris xanthocollis*

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SOME NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF THE MACHILIPATNAM AREA

(Originally written March 2004. Edited and updated, December 2024)

Text & Photos: Colin Conroy

Introduction

The area covered by this paper is situated on the coast of Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh, around the town of Machilipatnam and stretching for about 15km up the coast and 45km down the coast. The paper is mainly based on observations made by the author between January and June 2001, with additional observations made by J. Harjula (JH) during two brief visits in 1999, and by Dave Bookless (DB) in May 2000. Since the original writing of this article, some further observations were made by the author during a return visit to Machilipatnam in November 2005. The most interesting records from this visit are included in the species list that accompanies this article and, where appropriate, are referred to in the text.

It by no means represents a comprehensive study of the birds of this area, as many places within the area were not visited and others were only covered cursorily. Even in these areas, however, some interesting observations were made, which are worthy of mention here. Also, for various reasons, most observations were made from roads or from tracks navigable by bicycle.

Bird Habitats

The area falls entirely within the "Eastern coastal plains" of Andhra Pradesh, as described by Taher and Pittie (1989). The topography here is extremely flat and much of the land lies at, or below, sea level. A large proportion of the land area is taken up by agriculture, mainly rice paddy with a smaller area given over to groundnuts and other crops.

Immediately adjacent to the coast, much of the land formerly covered by either mangroves or paddy-fields, has been converted for fish and prawn aquaculture. Besides this, many former mangrove areas are now barren, mainly due to cutting for firewood, with only a small amount of salt-tolerant vegetation, and only covered by the highest tides (about once every three months). Reasonably healthy mangrove forest, with a good diversity of tree and shrub species, still exists along the creeks near the villages of Polatithippa and Gilakaladindi, at the mouth of the Gunderu Drain. However, due to cutting and grazing pressure in the past, there are few very tall trees, with most being well below the maximum height for their species. This area currently has no protection and continues to be under threat from cutting for firewood and building materials, pressure to convert it to aquaculture, and the development of a new port complex at Gilakaladindi. Besides this area, mangroves are also found going down the coast as far as the northern part of the Krishna River, near the villages of Malakayalanka and Palakayathippa. However, the mangroves here are mostly very stunted and species poor, with many large barren areas.

Both these areas have been the targets, since 1998, of a project aiming at the restoration and conservation of mangrove habitat, involving the local community. This work is facilitated by the Coastal Community Development Programme (CCDP), based in Machilipatnam.

[Dec 2024 Update - the work of CCDP, and all its programmes including the mangrove restoration work officially closed in December 2015. Visits since then by a former CCDP staff member (Eliah Gowri pers. comm.), plus examination of the series of satellite photos available on Google Earth) appear to indicate that most, if not all of the planted mangrove trees have survived and are growing well. The natural mangrove habitat near Polatithippa and Gilakaladindi also appears to be still flourishing.]

As stated by Taher & Pittie (1989), the soil here is very sandy and this can be seen in the area which stretches north-east from Machilipatnam, where there are large tracts of short, sandy grassland, heavily grazed by cattle, with scattered palm trees and *Casuarina* plantations.

However, notwithstanding these dry areas, the predominant theme in the whole area, and arguably the most important factor from an ornithological point of view, is water. There are many reed-fringed ponds hidden amongst the paddy-fields, and a large number of man-made channels cross the area. Many roads are lined on both sides by large beds of reedmace (*Typha* spp.). This is particularly true of the road going south from Machilipatnam, through the village of Chinnapuram, along which large numbers of Weavers and Munias can be found nesting, and three species of Bittern are seen regularly.

Finally, the coastline itself offers habitat for birds in the form of sandy beaches and muddy creeks. Migrating and wintering waders make good use of these, as well as of the numerous ponds, drains and flooded areas.

Species

As you travel around this area, the most visible groups of birds, aside from the ever-present Rollers, Bulbuls and Drongos, are those associated with water, particularly the Heron family, the Kingfishers and the waders (aka shorebirds). Of the passerines, the most noticeable and numerous are also those which are found around water, such as the Weavers and Munias. Three species of Weavers and three Munias are common throughout most of the area.

Of the Heron family, 11 species are regularly recorded and two more are seen occasionally. Although breeding hasn't been proved for most of these species, from the presence of good numbers all year round it seems likely that several of them, including all three Bitterns (Cinnamon, Yellow and Black) and Purple Heron, do actually breed here.

So far, with a relatively small amount of coverage, 28 species of waders *[Dec 2024 Update - the observation of 2 flocks of Black-tailed Godwits (Limosa limosa) by the author in Nov 2005 increases this number to 29]* have been seen and conversations with local people suggest that several more species occur here regularly. With more observation, at the right time of year, particularly on the coast, the wader list for this area could probably be increased to 33 or 35 species.

Four species of Kingfisher can regularly be seen in the area. White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) is the commonest of these, and the least tied to water. Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*) is frequent around flooded areas and aquaculture ponds. Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo attthis*) can be found in mangroves and wet channels just back from the coats. The rarest species here is Black-capped Kingfisher (*H. pileata*) which appears to be tied to the larger channels in the intact mangrove areas near Polatithippa.

The Crakes and Rails are also well represented, with six species recorded, plus the similar-looking but unrelated Bronze-winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*). All of these are likely to be resident, although all except White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*) and Bronze-winged Jacana are probably represented by fairly low numbers wherever there is suitable habitat.

If one looked at the species list alone, the other groups of waterbirds, such as wildfowl, Cormorants, Ibises, and other long-legged waterbirds, would appear to be fairly well represented. However, many of these birds are not common here, and only one or two records have so far been made. It seems likely that the majority of these records are of birds on passage, while other species might be more numerous just outside the area covered by this paper, notably in the river deltas to the north and south and along the channel of the Krishna going inland towards Vijayawada.

In the large areas of dry scrubby habitat and sandy grassland, the avifauna is less diverse, with three Larks, two Cuckoos, one Pipit and a smattering of birds from other groups, being recorded regularly.

So far only six species of raptors have been recorded here, and only two, Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) and Indian Shikra (*Accipiter badius*), are at all common.

Being on the coast, this area is important for migration, particularly of waders, but also of passerines such as Wagtails and Warblers. Consequently, particularly during the peak migration times, almost anything can turn up.

Interesting / unusual bird records during Jan-Jun 2001
During the main study period several observations were made which were interesting or unusual for one reason or another.

Grey-Headed Lapwing (*Vanellus cinereus*)
The small wintering flock of Grey-headed Lapwings which was present from at least the 6th of February 2001 until 3rd May, when the last bird was seen, constituted the first record of this species for the state of Andhra Pradesh (Conroy 2003). According to Grimmett et al. (1998), the nearest place where Grey-headed Lapwings regularly occur is 1000km away in West Bengal, where they winter. Outside West Bengal and North-East India, they are rare elsewhere in the country and so a group of 12 on the coast of Andhra Pradesh is a very interesting record. The question that now has to be asked is "was this just a freak occurrence or is this a regular wintering site?" This can only be answered by careful searching of the area in future years. As coastal Andhra Pradesh receives relatively little coverage by birdwatchers, it is possible that there are other sites along the coast where these birds occur. If so, this would constitute a significant range extension.

[Dec 2024 update - publicly available records on E-bird reveal that there have been several records made of this species in Krishna District and neighbouring districts of Andhra Pradesh since 2001, all between the months of December and April, and at least some involving small groups of birds. This would seem to imply that Grey-headed Lapwing is indeed a regular winter visitor in the region.]

Long-toed Stint (*Calidris subminuta*)
A single individual of this species was watched for three hours in April 2001. Very good views were had, photographs taken (albeit poor quality) (see photos below) and a detailed description written down. Although the *Helm Identification Guide, Shorebirds* (Hayman et al. 1986), shows the wintering range of Long-toed Stint as covering the whole eastern side of India including some of Andhra Pradesh, it seems that there has been only one other documented record from Andhra Pradesh, at Pulicat Lake in the extreme south of the state (Grimmett et al. 1998, Taher & Pittie 1989, Bombay Natural History Society pers comm.).

This species breeds in a broad band across Siberia and winters in south-east Asia, Indonesia, the Philippines and parts of Australia. It may well be fairly regular along the coastal strip of Andhra Pradesh, although lack of observers and the similarity of the bird to Temminck's and Little Stints may have resulted in it being over-looked hitherto.

Long-toed Stint (*Calidris subminuta*)
(Machilipatnam, April 20, 2021)
© Colin Conroy, 2001

[Dec 2024 update - the publicly available records for this species seem to show that the above prediction was accurate. There have been several records of this species in coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh since 2019, often including multiple birds, with most records being in the months between September and March]

Streaked and Black-Breasted Weaver (*Ploceus manyar & P. benghalensis*)
The distribution information in Grimmett et al. (1998) and Taher & Pittie (1989) would seem to indicate that these species do not occur at all in the whole coastal zone of Andhra Pradesh. Observations in 2001, and also previous years, show that this is incorrect. Both species were present in abundance during 2001 in suitable habitat, and nest-building of both species was observed. Moreover, a trip to Kolleru Lake, in the neighbouring West Godavari district, on the 1st of May 2001, revealed that Streaked Weaver at least, was abundant here also.

Blue-tailed Bee-eater (*Merops philippinus*) present in summer and apparently breeding
The Blue-tailed Bee-eater is generally considered to occur in winter in peninsular India, and then migrate to other regions to breed (Grimmett et al. 1998, Fry et al. 1992). However, the situation around Machilipatnam in the first six months of 2001 appears to tell a different story. There were no records at all of this species made until 25th of March, after which point they started to be seen with increasing regularity, both in the mangroves and in other areas near the coast. On the 30th of May at least 25 were seen at the same place that the Grey-headed Lapwings had frequented, and then on the 6th of June, searching of the sandy grassland just back from the coastline revealed an area of shallow pits containing at least 4 nest holes, one of which was seen with a bird going into it. At least fourteen birds were seen in this area, and there were many small pits suitable for Bee-eater nest-sites, and so it seems likely that several pairs bred here in 2001. Moreover, this area fits very closely to the description of Blue-tailed Bee-eater nesting habitat given in the Helm Identification Guide, Kingfishers, Bee-eaters and Rollers (Fry et al. 1992) - "dry loamy or sandy soils in open flat areas such as coastal dunes".

About 30 birds were seen later in the month near the village of Malakayalanka, further down the coast. Also, at least 6 were seen at the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary, East Godavari District, on the 15th of June 2001, and so it seems as if this is another case of insufficient coverage leading to a misleading picture of a species' occurrence.

Rufous-tailed Lark (*Ammomanes phoenicura*)
There were two records of this species, both from the banks of the Krishna estuary, one of which was of a pair behaving in a way that indicated that they might have been breeding. This is a range extension for this species which has hitherto not been thought to occur in the coastal strip on the east side of India (Grimmett et al.1998, Taher & Pittie 1989).

Predictions for future additions to species list
It is almost inevitable that regular, ongoing observations by competent birders will continue to add new birds to the list for this area for some time to come. However, the group which is most likely to be the source of these additions is the waders. In a relatively short period of time, with only very incomplete coverage, 28 species have been recorded here, including one which was new for the district (and only the second for the state). There is a large amount of suitable habitat for waders on passage and in winter, although much of this is difficult to access. Species which seem likely to occur, either regularly or occasionally, include Pin-tailed Snipe (*Gallinago stenura*), Jack Snipe (*Lymnocryptes minimus*), Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*), Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*), Sanderling (*Calidris alba*), Dunlin (*C. alpina*), Broad-billed Sandpiper (*C. falcinellus*), Ruff (C. *pugnax*), Indian Thick-knee (*Burhinus indicus*), Great Thick-knee (*Esacus recurvirostris*), Eurasian Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*), Pied Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*), Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*), Common Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) and Greater Sand Plover (*Anarhynchus leschenaultii*).

Another group which may well be better represented than existing records would appear to show is the migratory Warblers. These birds are often both inconspicuous and hard to identify and so diligence and experience are needed to complete this part of the picture of the birds of Machilipatnam. Species which might be expected include Paddyfield Warbler (*Acrocephalus agricola*), Thick-billed Warbler (*Arundinax aedon*), Booted Warbler (*Iduna caligata*), and Greenish Warbler (*Ph. trochiloides*).

Outlook for conservation of birds and other wildlife in Machilipatnam area
The most important habitat, from a conservation point of view, in this area, is of course, mangrove forest. This habitat has been so heavily impacted in the past that there is very little left. The only area of reasonably healthy and diverse forest in the study area is the forest around Polatithippa and Gilakaladindi, and currently this is not protected in any way by the law. It continues to be exploited for firewood and building materials, and may well be affected by the new port development in Gilakaladindi, which is currently under construction. Also, in common with mangroves all over the world, it has hanging over it the ever present threat of conversion to aquaculture. Despite these threats, the outlook is rosier than it might otherwise be, as a result of the work of CCDP in the area. This project aims both to protect existing mangroves through education and by helping people find alternative sources of income, and to increase the area of mangrove forest by planting nursery grown seedlings in former mangrove areas.

Most of the other bird habitats in the area are almost entirely artificial, being the result of agricultural practices. Most of the paddyfields immediately adjacent to the coast have already been lost, when they were converted to aquaculture in the 1990s. This must have had a negative impact on bird populations as it would have led to the loss of all the habitat which is found around and in between paddyfields in this area, particularly the reed-fringed pools and ditches which provide homes for birds such as Crakes and Rails, and also Weavers and Munias.

It would also have meant a change from a freshwater habitat to a brackish-water one. This would certainly affect invertebrates and amphibians and so presumably would have an effect on birds too. Any similar rapid change in agriculture in the future will probably have similar effects on birdlife.

Conclusion

The coastal area of Krishna District in Andhra Pradesh has been little visited by birdwatchers in the past, perhaps because it is a largely agricultural zone with little in the way of pristine natural habitat. It is also a little off the beaten track and away from areas normally visited by tourists. However, as this article shows, it is far from being a bird-free zone and offers opportunities to increase the body of knowledge about the distribution and behaviour of many species. Of particular interest are the waders, as is made evident by the fact that one new species, and one second record for Andhra Pradesh were recorded in a short period at the beginning of 2001. Further visits would almost certainly result in more additions to the district or state bird-lists.

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Sl No	Scientific Name	English Name	Description of status	Additional significant records from November 2005
1	*Podiceps ruficollis*	Little Grebe	Widely recorded thoughout area	
2	*Pelecanus philippensis*	Spot-billed Pelican	Single record from mouth of northern arm of R. Krishna delta, by JH 1999	
3	*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*	Indian Cormorant	Widespread in low numbers throughout period of observation. No breeding observed	
4	*Phalacrocorax niger*	Little Cormorant	Widespread in low numbers throughout period of observation. No breeding observed	
5	*Ardea cinerea*	Grey Heron	Several recorded from wet areas on west of town, in Jan and Feb	
6	*Ardea purpurea*	Purple Heron	Widespread resident. Probably breeds	
7	*Ardea alba*	Great Egret	Occasional records from mangroves and estuary in Feb and Mar	
8	*Butorides striata*	Striated Heron	Present throughout, in mangroves. Probably breeds	
9	*Ardeola grayii*	Indian Pond Heron	Very common throughout area	
10	*Bubulcus coromandus*	Eastern Cattle Egret	Very common throughout area	
11	*Ardea intermedia*	Intermediate Egret	Common in paddyfields and mangrove creeks	
12	*Egretta garzetta*	Little Egret	Common throughout area	
13	*Egretta gularis*	Western Reef Egret	Low numbers present throughout in mangrove creeks	
14	*Nycticorax nycticorax*	Black-crowned Night Heron	Occasional sightings throughout year	
15	*Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*	Cinnamon Bittern	Scarce in winter (Jan- March). Common in summer (Apr - June) in Marshes, reedbeds and mangroves	
16	*Ixobrychus sinensis*	Yellow Bittern	Common in Typha beds throughout area. Seen carrying nest material, May 2001	
17	*Ixobrychus flavicollis*	Black Bittern	Widespread resident. Recorded from 8 different sites during Jan-May 2001	
18	*Mycteria leucocephala*	Painted Stork	5 recorded by JH in 1999	
19	*Anastomus oscitans*	Asian Openbill	Flocks of 20, 30, & 80 over town, in Feb 1999 (JH). Several flocks in mangroves (largest c. 500 birds) Feb-May 2001	

Sl No	Scientific Name	English Name	Description of status	Additional significant records from November 2005
20	*Ciconia nigra*	Black Stork	3 seen in flight Nov 1999 (JH)	
21	*Threskiornis aethiopica*	Black-headed Ibis	Occasional records thoughout area. Max. flock size 7 (all juvs.)	
22	*Pseudibis papillosa*	Black Ibis	1 juv. recorded Nov 1999 (JH)	
23	*Plegadis falcinellus*	Glossy Ibis	Flock of 15 seen several times Mar 2001	
24	*Platalea leucorodia*	Eurasian Spoonbill	Flock of 100 by northern arm of R. Krishna delta, Nov 1999 (JH)	
25	*Phoenicopterus roseus*	Greater Flamingo	41 on small creek at north of area, in Nov 1999 (JH). Bird described by locals and reported to be regular Sept-Nov, near Polatithippa village, is possibly this species	
26	*Dendrocygna javanica*	Lesser Whistling-duck	Single record (2 birds) Apr 2001	
27	*Tadorna ferruginea*	Ruddy Shelduck	Flock of 15 over northern arm of R. Krishna delta, Mar 2001	
28	*Spatula querquedula*	Garganey	2 on. northern arm of R. Krishna delta, Mar 2001	
29	*Spatula clypeata*	Northern Shoveler	3 flocks seen 1999, over northern arm of R. Krishna delta (JH)	
30	*Nettapus coromandelianus*	Cotton Pygmy-goose	Single record (5 birds), from pond in paddy-fields, Apr 2001	
31	*Elanus caeruleus*	Black-winged Kite	Widespread throughout area. One found dead on 30 May 2001	
32	*Milvus migrans*	Black Kite	Very common throughout area	
33	*Haliastur indus*	Brahminy Kite	Low numbers present throughout	
34	*Accipiter badius*	Shikra	Common in northern half of area	
35	*Aquila rapax*	Tawny Eagle	1 recorded May 2000 (DB)	
36	*Ichthyophaga leucogaster*	White-bellied Sea Eagle	1 recorded several times in 1999, near northern arm of R. Krishna delta (JH)	
37	*Circus* sp.	Harrier sp.	Several records from near mouth of northern arm of R. Krishna delta in 1999 and 2001. Not identified to species	
38	*Falco tinnunculus*	European Kestrel	Several seen in Nov 1999 (JH)	
39	*Ortygornis pondicerianus*	Grey Francolin	Single record (2 birds) in Mar 2001	
40	*Lewinia striata*	Slaty-breasted Rail	Single record in Jun 2001	
41	*Zapornia fusca*	Ruddy-breasted Crake	1 seen by DB in mangroves, May 2000. 1 seen several times in pond in paddy-fields north-east of town, May-Jun 2001	
42	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*	White-breasted Waterhen	Common near water throughout area	
43	*Gallicrex cinerea*	Watercock	4 observations, max 3 individuals, May-Jun 2001	
44	*Gallinula chloropus*	Common Moorhen	Widespread in low numbers	
45	*Porphyrio poliocephalus*	Grey-headed Swamphen	Widespread in low numbers	
46	*Metopidius indicus*	Bronze-winged Jacana	Widespread breeding resident	
47	*Vanellus cinereus*	Grey-headed Lapwing	Wintering flock (max. 12 birds) present Feb-April 2001. Last record 03 Apr 2001	
48	*Vanellus indicus*	Red-wattled Lapwing	Widespread resident in low numbers	
49	*Vanellus malabaricus*	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	Occasional records only (max. 5 birds)	
50	*Pluvialis squatarola*	Grey Plover	10 recorded by JH Feb 1999	

Sl No	Scientific Name	English Name	Description of status	Additional significant records from November 2005
51	*Pluvialis fulva*	Pacific Golden Plover	Widespread in winter	
52	*Charadrius dubius*	Little Ringed Plover	Widespread in winter on dry grassland	
53	*Anarhyncus alexandrinus*	Kentish Plover	Common on barren areas in mangroves	
54	*Anarhynchus atrifrons*	Tibetan Sandplover	Several records from coastal area from all times of year. Probably under-recorded	
55	*Anarhynchus leschenaultii*	Greater Sandplover	Several recorded by JH in Feb and Nov 1999	
56	*Numenius phaeopus*	Whimbrel	Low numbers in winter and on passage	
57	*Numenius arquata*	Eurasian Curlew	Low numbers in winter and on passage	
58	*Limosa limosa*	Black-tailed Godwit		Flocks of 145 and 50 in flooded fields north of Machilipatnam
59	*Tringa totanus*	Common Redshank	Low numbers in winter and on passage	
60	*Tringa stagnatilis*	Marsh Sandpiper	Low numbers in winter and on passage	
61	*Tringa nebularia*	Common Greenshank	Low numbers in winter and on passage	
62	*Tringa ochropus*	Green Sandpiper	Two records (single birds) late Mar 2001, probably winters in low numbers	
63	*Tringa glareola*	Wood Sandpiper	Very common inland in winter	
64	*Xenus cinereus*	Terek Sandpiper	Several records from mangrove creeks and beaches, Mar-May	
65	*Actitis hypoleucos*	Common Sandpiper	Very common in mangrove creeks in winter	
66	*Arenaria interpres*	Ruddy Turnstone	Single record (1 bird) May 2001. May be more common	
67	*Gallinago* sp.	Snipe sp.	Occasional records of single birds Nov-Mar. Could not be reliably identified to species	
68	*Calidris minuta*	Little Stint	Common in winter and on passage	
69	*Calidris temminckii*	Temminck's Stint	Scarce in winter and on passage	
70	*Calidris subminuta*	Long-toed Stint	Single record (1 bird) Apr 2001. May be regular on passage in low numbers	
71	*Calidris ferruginea*	Curlew Sandpiper	Recorded by JH, Nov 1999	
72	*Rostratula benghalensis*	Greater Painted-snipe	One seen in Mar 2001. May be under-recorded	
73	*Himantopus himantopus*	Black-winged Stilt	Low numbers seen on ponds and marshes at all times of year	Flock of 41 in flooded fields north of Machilipatnam
74	*Glareola maldivarum*	Oriental Pratincole	Several records (max. 3 birds), Apr-June 2001. May breed in low numbers	
75	*Glareola lactea*	Small Pratincole	Several recorded on sandy creek in north of area in Feb 1999 (JH)	
76	*Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus*	Pallas's Gull	Occasional records from beaches and river-mouth. Most records involve young birds	
77	*Croicocephalus brunnicephalus*	Brown-headed Gull	Low numbers seen on coast	
78	*Chlidonias hybridus*	Whiskered Tern	Flock of c.60 seen feeding over a large drainage channel, 04 Mar 2001	
79	*Gelochelidon nilotica*	Gull-billed Tern	Several records from mouth of northern arm of R. Krishna delta, Nov-Mar	
80	*Hydroprogne caspia*	Caspian Tern	Low number present throughout in mangrove creeks	
81	*Thalasseus bengalensis*	Lesser Crested Tern	Recorded by DB, May 2000	
82	*Sterna albifrons*	Little Tern	Commonly recorded in mangrove creeks and river mouth	

Sl No	Scientific Name	English Name	Description of status	Additional significant records from November 2005
83	*Columba livia*	Rock Pigeon	Common around town	
84	*Streptopelia decaocto*	Eurasian Collared Dove	Common throughout area	
85	*Streptopelia tranquebarica*	Red Collared Dove	Several recorded in Nov 1999 (JH). None since	
86	*Spilopelia chinensis*	Spotted Dove	Common in drier areas	
87	*Psittacula krameri*	Rose-ringed Parakeet	Very common in drier areas and round villages	
88	*Clamator jacobinus*	Pied Cuckoo	Fairly common, mostly in drier areas. One record from mangroves (May 2001)	
89	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	Asian Koel	Very common around town	
90	*Centropus sinensis*	Greater Coucal	Widespread and fairly common	
91	*Athene brama*	Spotted Owlet	Few records from dry areas with palm trees. Probably under-recorded	
92	*Apus affinis*	Little Swift	Low numbers present in Jan and Feb. Common in Nov 1999 (JH)	
93	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*	Asian Palm Swift	Common throughout year	
94	*Ceryle rudis*	Pied Kingfisher	Present throughout. More numerous in winter	
95	*Alcedo atthis*	Common Kingfisher	Common in mangroves at all times. Occasionally seen elsewhere. Breeding status uncertain, due to lack of suitable nesting sites, particularly in mangroves	
96	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	White-throated Kingfisher	Present throughout, but most common Jan-Mar	
97	*Halcyon pileata*	Black-capped Kingfisher	Up to 6 present in mangroves until Apr 2001	None seen in mangroves on singe visit - villagers said they were still there
98	*Merops philippinus*	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	Regularly seen between 25 Mar 2001 and 21 June 2001. Max. flock size 25-30. Evidence of breeding seen at one site	
99	*Merops orientalis*	Green Bee-eater	Common resident throughout area	
100	*Coracias benghalensis*	Indian Roller	Common resident throughout area	
101	*Upupa epops*	Eurasian Hoopoe	Two records (single birds), Apr & May 2001	
102	*Psilopogon haemacephalus*	Coppersmith Barbet	Uncommon. Single birds at one site on edge of town	
103	*Dinopium benghalense*	Black-rumped Flameback	Common among palm trees in drier areas	
104	*Mirafra affinis*	Jerdon's Bushlark	Low numbers resident in dry areas	
105	*Eremopterix griseus*	Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark	Low numbers resident in dry areas	
106	*Ammomanes phoenicura*	Rufous-tailed Lark	Two records from banks of northern arm of R. Krishna delta	
107	*Alauda gulgula*	Oriental Skylark	Widespread resident	
108	*Hirundo rustica*	Barn Swallow	Common in Nov 1999 (JH). Low numbers present Jan-Mar 2001	
109	*Cecropis daurica*	Red-rumped Swallow	Occasional records Jan-Apr 2001. (Max.15)	
110	*Lanius vittatus*	Bay-backed Shrike	Recorded by DB, May 2000	
111	*Lanius schach*	Long-tailed Shrike	Scarce. Two records from Mar & Apr 2001, the latter being a juvenile	
112	*Lanius cristatus*	Brown Shrike	Low numbers present in Nov 1999 (JH) and Feb-Apr 2001	

Sl No	Scientific Name	English Name	Description of status	Additional significant records from November 2005
113	*Oriolus kundoo*	Indian Golden Oriole	Several records of single birds Jan-Mar 2001	
114	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	Black Drongo	Very common resident throughout area	
115	*Artamus fuscus*	Ashy Woodswallow	Common resident but patchily distributed	
116	*Pastor roseus*	Rosy Starling	Flocks of 20 & 30 seen, Mar & Apr 2001	
117	*Gracupica contra*	Asian Pied Starling	Common resident throughout area	
118	*Acridotheres tristis*	Common Myna	Very common resident throughout area	
119	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*	Rufous Treepie	Scarce resident, mainly in palm trees near coast	
120	*Corvus splendens*	House Crow	Very common resident throughout area	
121	*Corvus macrorhynchus*	Large-billed Crow	Very common resident throughout area	
122	*Pycnonotus cafer*	Red-vented Bulbul	Very common resident throughout area	
123	*Argya striata*	Jungle Babbler	Scarce resident. 3 records of 1-2 birds	
124	*Argya affinis*	Yellow-billed Babbler	Resident. Regularly recorded from two areas on edge of town	
125	*Cisticola juncidis*	Zitting Cisticola	Uncommon resident	
126	*Prinia inornata*	Plain Prinia	Fairly common resident	
127	*Prinia socialis*	Ashy Prinia	Common resident in areas with emergent aquatic vegetation and in mangroves	
128	*Acrocephalus stentoreus*	Clamorous Reed Warbler	Two records of singing males	
129	*Acrocephalus dumetorum*	Blyth's Reed Warbler	Reasonably common in suitable habitat in winter	
130	*Phylloscopus fuscatus*	Dusky Warbler	1 possible, Feb 1999 (JH). Not unexpected in winter and on passage	
131	*Saxicola caprata*	Pied Bushchat	Low numbers resident in dry areas	
132	*Anthus rufulus*	Paddyfield Pipit	Common on sandy grassland areas	
133	*Motacilla flava/tschutschensis*	Easter/Western Yellow Wagtail	Seen occasionally in winter and on passage. Largest flock 70 (Mar 2001). All identified as 'Yellow Wagtail' at time	
134	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*	White-browed Wagtail	1 record, Apr 2001	
135	*Leptocoma zeylonica*	Purple-rumped Sunbird	Fairly common resident	
136	*Ciinyris asiaticus*	Purple Sunbird	Fairly common resident	
137	*Passer domesticus*	House Sparrow	Common in villages	
138	*Gymnoris xanthocollis*	Yellow-throated Sparrow	Present in low numbers	
139	*Ploceus philippinus*	Baya Weaver	Resident. Several colonies seen	
140	*Ploceus benghalensis*	Black-breasted Weaver	Resident. Breeds frequently in mixed colonies with Streaked Weaver, but in lower numbers than this species	
141	*Ploceus manyar*	Streaked Weaverbird	Abundant resident	
142	*Euodice malabarica*	Indian Silverbill	Flock of 30 seen Mar 2001	
143	*Lonchura punctulata*	Scaly-breasted Munia	Flock of c30 seen Mar 2001	
144	*Lonchura malacca*	Tricoloured Munia	Occasional flocks seen (max 40)	

Colin Conroy is a birder, botanist and restoration ecologist from the UK, where he currently works as a Senior Botanist for a national infrastructure project. He has birded in many parts of the world, including four years in Lebanon and over a year in Canada. In 2001, just after finishing his Masters in Restoration Ecology, he spent nearly six months in India, volunteering for the Coastal Community Development Project in Machilipatnam, Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh, on their mangrove restoration programme. During that time he joined what was then the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh on some of our field trips, and he says he was made very welcome by the members. Colin can be reached at colintheconroy@yahoo.co.uk

Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Malabar Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros coronatus*)

Malabar Pied Hornbill adult female (L) and male (R)

Malabar Pied Hornbill immature

(Dandeli, Karnataka, October 30, 2024)

Order:	Bucerotiformes
Family:	Bucerotidae
Genus:	*Anthracoceros*
Species:	*A. coronatus*
Size:	65 cm

Description & distribution: The Malabar Pied Hornbill, also known as the Lesser Pied Hornbill, is a monotypic species. It is a large bird, predominantly black in colour, but with a white belly, throat patch, tail sides and trailing edge to its wings. The heavy bill is waxy lemon yellow, with a prominent, mainly black casque. The casque is axe-shaped (as opposed to cylindrical in the Oriental Pied Hornbill, with which this bird may sometimes be confused) and has a pronounced tip, and a large black patch along the sharp upper ridge. In juvenile birds the casque may be missing or not very noticeable. The two sexes are similar, except that the male birds have blue-black orbital skin as against pinkish in the female birds; female birds also have a smaller casque. Outer tail feathers are all-white (as compared to white-tipped black feathers in Oriental Pied Hornbill).

The Malabar Pied Hornbill is endemic to the Western Ghats (western Maharashtra south through Goa, western Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and Kerala), some parts of Central and Eastern India (western West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, northern and eastern Madhya Pradesh, northern Andhra Pradesh, and north-eastern tip of Telangana), and Sri Lanka. In

Habitat & behaviour: The Malabar Pied Hornbill is a sociable, noisy bird, usually seen in pairs or small groups, feeding on fruits or berries, although it does also eat lizards, small mammals, rodents like mice, reptiles, insects and baby birds. It is arboreal, and moves around with heavy hopping movements inside large fruiting trees. It prefers evergreen or moist deciduous forests, mostly near human habitation. As with most Hornbills, flight is heavy and ponderous, with a strong flap-and-glide pattern, with wingtips upturned. It emits a variety of nasal squeals, loud cackling and screams – Salim Ali likens the calls to "the protestations of a *dak* bungalow *murghi*, seized by the cook, and also the yelps of a smacked puppy!"

Nesting: The Malabar Pied Hornbill breeds mainly between March and June. It is a secondary cavity nester, being incapable of digging its own nest, and hence nests in large cavities in trees. Like other hornbills, the female locks herself within the cavity, blocking off the entrance with a mixture of mud, droppings and fruit pulp, and leaving only a narrow opening through which the female disposes of excreta, and receives food from the male. Once the chicks have grown too large, the female breaks out, then rebuilds the wall around the opening, after which both parents feed the chicks. The usual clutch consists of 2-4 white eggs with wood-brown stains.

Local name: The Malabar Pied Hornbill is known as *'Dhan chiri'* in Hindi, *'Suleimani murghi'* in Deccani, *'Irattai chondu kuruvi'* in Tamil, *'Vezhambal'* in Malayalam, *'Batta chupanati'* in Telugu, *'Kanari'* in Konkani, *'Kuchla kha'* in Odiya, *'Bagma dhanesh'* in Bengali, and *'Poruwa kandetta'* in Sinhala.

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For information, write to: Deccan Birders, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **Website:** www.deccanbirders.in. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/deccanbirders. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (*Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)*